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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 001085

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [GZ](#) [IS](#) [GAZA](#) [DISENGAGEMENT](#) [ISRAELI](#) [PALESTINIAN](#) [AFFAIRS](#)

SUBJECT: GAZANS, FOR VARYING REASONS, FAVOR PA CABINET OF  
"TECHNOCRATS"

REF: JERUSALEM 0695

Classified By: Pol/C Norm Olsen for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: Prominent Gazans expressed, for varying reasons, a strong preference for a cabinet of technocrats in conversations with Poloff February 22-23. Minister of Justice candidate and prominent Gaza attorney Sharhabeel al-Za'eem said that Gazans view new faces in the ministries as a concrete sign of positive change under Abu Mazen; even the discussion is generating excitement among a population in the strip hitherto extremely skeptical of the prospects for any meaningful change. Marwan Kanafani, head of the PLC Political Committee, said that he, too, is adamant that the cabinet be one of technocrats, although he did not cite technical competence as his reason per se. Kanafani appeared to be more concerned about the inclusion of some PLC members over others, prompting his position of "all technocrats or none" in the cabinet. End Summary.

2. (C) Questioned about the ongoing crisis in formulating a Palestinian government, prominent Gazans, for varying reasons, expressed a strong preference for "new faces" in the selection of ministerial candidates. Gaza lawyer Sharhabeel al-Za'eem, himself a so-far unsuccessful "technocrat" candidate for Minister of Justice, told Poloff February 21 that he is not campaigning for the position. "Either they want technical competence, or they don't," he said. Al-Za'eem said his name had been on the proposed cabinet list, only to be removed at the last minute in the early morning hours February 21. Regarding the slate of ministers presented to the PLC February 21, al-Za'eem accused PM Abu Ala'a of failing to think creatively, or even "to think at all" in crafting the list, which al-Za'eem said contained too many names of individuals who have held a series of positions in the PA since its establishment in 1994. Al-Za'eem said that the "revolt" in the PLC that has blocked adoption of the cabinet thus far is led by new generation Fatah members, whose resentment of long-entrenched Fatah politicians has reached a climax. Palestinians, said al-Za'eem, are fed up with seeing the same old faces.

3. (C) His personal, less-than-clear situation notwithstanding, al-Za'eem did not express frustration with the ongoing, messy political process. On the contrary, he fairly gushed with enthusiasm at the public discussion and political energy of the process, adding that this feeling is shared by increasing numbers in Gaza. Until now, he said, Gazans have been reticent in expressing any hopes, high or otherwise, for the future, preferring to adopt a "wait and see" attitude borne of repeated disappointments. Speculating on what may have tipped the balance, al-Za'eem said that the hope of seeing some fresh faces in the government seems to have at last sparked people's interest. That, said al-Za'eem, is the main factor convincing people that Abu Mazen does, indeed, stand for change. Abu Ala'a, he said, is increasingly being viewed as a block to progress.

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Same Answer, Different Reasoning  
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4. (C) Marwan Kanafani, Head of the PLC Political Committee, told Poloff February 23 that he, too, favors a cabinet of technocrats, although he did not cite a desire for technically competent ministers as his reason per se. Kanafani said he opposes any cabinet that includes PLC members or other non-technocrats: "How can we support the inclusion of some PLC members and not others?" Specifically, Kanafani said he strongly opposed the inclusion of either Sa'eb Erekat or Nabil Sha'ath, as both are members of the PLC. Kanafani predicted that a proposed cabinet that included them would fail again, although he doubted whether Abu Ala'a himself would be replaced for failing to form a government.

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Looking to a Future in the PLC?  
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5. (C) Al-Za'eem, who said he is untroubled as to whether he enters the government or not, confided that he intends to run in the PLC elections in July regardless. Saying he will run as an independent, al-Za'eem described the process of registration as quite simple, requiring only that a potential

candidate present a petition with 500 signatures to the electoral committee. He added that "many people" are thinking of running, and called the heightened interest yet more evidence that people may be starting to believe that things are changing for the better under Abu Mazen.

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